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SUBJECT: RULING DMK PARTY WINS TAMIL NADU LOCAL POLLS

REF: Chennai 2359

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The ruling DMK party and its allies -- including the Congress -- emerged clear winners in the October elections to Tamil Nadu local bodies, but the victory was tainted by wide allegations of violence by DMK henchmen, particularly in Chennai. The DMK hopes the violence will soon be forgotten after coalition party office holders take charge of the local administration and begin to use the funds devolved to the local bodies. The very poor showing by the BJP has exposed its lack of roots in Tamil Nadu. END SUMMARY

2. (U) Results of the elections to Tamil Nadu local bodies (reftel), which were announced on October 21, showed a major victory for the ruling DMK party and its Democratic Progressive Alliance (DPA) which includes the Congress. The DPA appears to have captured all six Municipal Corporations (Chennai, Madurai, Trichy, Coimbatore, Salem and Tirunelveli) and a majority of the Municipalities, Town Panchayats, Panchayat Unions and District Panchayats. The precise number of local bodies the parties will control will become clear after the elected ward members meet later in October to elect their respective Chairpersons.

3. (SBU) The DMK's significant margin of victory is clear in the numbers announced by the State Election Commission. According to the Commission, the DMK secured 238 Ward Members in the Corporations (the opposition AIADMK won only 62), 1249 in Municipalities (AIADMK: 777), 2639 in Town Panchayats (AIADMK: 1643), 2488 in Panchayat Unions (AIADMK: 1417) and 312 in District Panchayats (AIADMK: 157). The impressive performance of the DMK in an Assembly by-election at Madurai on October 11 also confirmed the state electorate's mood. While the Congress party fared well in the local bodies election in alliance with the DMK and took the third position after the AIADMK, the BJP made the poorest showing rendering itself almost insignificant Tamil Nadu. "We are in tatters; our electoral significance is less than zilch in Tamil Nadu," lamented a local BJP leader Ms. Lalitha Kumaramangalam. In contrast, Tamil Nadu's newest political party, the DMDK led by film actor Vijayakant, contested alone and showed a promising start.

4. (SBU) Asked about reports of violence in the local polls, Chief Secretary Tripathy told us on October 23 that they were media

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blowups. He conceded that there were instances of minor violence "here and there," but he alleged they came in response to AIADMK sponsored violence.

5. (SBU) COMMENT: The DMK-led DPA's victory in the polls has consolidated the firm hold on power it gained in the Assembly polls in May. The victory, however, lost much of its sheen due to the poll-related violence in Chennai, as was evident in the DMK's low-key victory celebrations. The DMK hopes that the violence would be forgotten after the party takes charge of the local

administration funds and projects for the next five years.  
Meanwhile, the very poor showing by the BJP -- far behind the Congress and even the CPI(M) -- has exposed the party's lack of roots in Tamil Nadu. The local bodies election was dominated by local concerns. Larger issues, such as the conflict on Sri Lanka or the policies of the central government, played no role. END  
COMMENT.  
HOPPER